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SOVIET FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY
UNDER THE BREZHNEV-KOSYGIN REGIME

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I would like to begin this discussion of Soviet foreign policy under the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime with some remarks on the general process of policy and decision-making in the Soviet Union.

One of the first problems faced by an outside observer seeking to describe the dynamics of Soviet policy is that of finding an adequate conceptual model to explain how the policymaking machinery operates and to help identify the determinants which lie behind specific policy decisions and actions of the Soviet party and government leaders.

I shall not attempt here to delineate the many conceptual approaches to an understanding of Soviet "reality" that have been favored at one time or another by analysts of Soviet society and politics. Rather, let it suffice to sketch what appear to be the two most sharply contrasting models which one may encounter today.

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The first of these has a lineage reaching back to the concept of a self-perpetuating totalitarianism that was widely employed to describe the Soviet system under Stalin during its earlier stages of forced industrial growth and consolidation of Communist authority and legitimacy. In the course of time this model has undergone some revision, in recognition of the fact that as the Soviet Union has evolved into a more mature and complex industrial society -- both under Khrushchev and his successors -- there has been a gradual shift away from the full-fledged totalitarian "command system" of the Stalinist age. However, the basic political assumption underlying this model has remained essentially unchanged during the transition from the harsh autocracy of the Stalinist period to the somewhat less rigid oligarchic rule of the present collective leadership, to wit: An authoritarian leadership with highly centralized machinery of planning and control at its disposal is assumed to be in a position to make up its mind according to its own calculation of preferred policy alternatives and to dictate its decisions to all subordinate echelons of Party and State for implementation.

Viewed through the conceptual lenses of this model, Soviet policymaking is seen as the work of a fully-informed, unitary leadership which bases its decisions on rationalized weighing of pros and cons, costs and gains, and which can be expected to make more or less purposive choices among a range of courses of action leading toward its preferred goals. In essence, this amounts to saying that the top Soviet leadership is the master and not the captive of the overlapping bureaucracies over which it nominally

presides, and that within the parameters of opportunity and constraint which confront any government in the international arena, it will seek rational policy "solutions" best suited to serve its perceived interests.

I believe it is fair to say that this particular model -- stressing a unitary, rationalized policymaking process fully under the control of a stable, dictatorial leadership -- tends to provide the standard frame of reference still employed either explicitly or implicitly by many who address themselves to the explanation and prediction of Soviet political behavior. However, this model has come to be challenged increasingly in recent years by various Western scholars looking to the concepts of comparative systems analysis and the theory of complex organizations for other models better suited to interpret the processes of change, diversification, and interest-group politics at work within the formal structure of Soviet institutions. One finds, therefore, a new model or paradigm coming into use, which differs notably in some respects from its predecessor.

Perhaps the basic assumption upon which this contrasting model rests is that no single centralized leadership entity -- even in a highly authoritarian or totalitarian system -- has the time and information at its disposal to make all of the important decisions for the system. Since the top leadership cannot master all the details and complexities of the issues with which it deals it must depend on inputs of information and technical judgment flowing upward from subordinate organizations. These organizations in turn operate according to their own bureaucratic rules and procedures: They have their

own institutional momentum, vested interests to protect, axes to grind, constituencies to please, traditional claims on the budget, commitments to programs already laid down, and so on. As centers of partial power in the system, the various bureaucracies have a claim to be heard; the way they marshal their arguments and the skill of their advocacy can help to structure the issues as they are presented to the top leadership, so that in a sense the policy options open to it are already somewhat circumscribed before they become a matter of decision.

Although the Soviet government is not one of formal checks and balances, when viewed in terms of this model, the proliferation of power within a large and complex bureaucratic system like that in the Soviet Union may in some sense serve as a haphazard substitute for constitutional checks upon central authority. It (the bureaucratic proliferation of power) tends to beget potential vetoes upon policy and may lead to immobilism in action, especially innovatory action that breaks with established ways of doing things. In effect, this model places the top leadership at the center of a bureaucratic process which may encumber response to new problems and situations as often as it facilitates their "solution," and it suggests that the policies which emerge from the process may represent something less than the product of optimum choice among a full array of alternatives. Even what appear to be high-level decisions reached for the weightiest reasons of national interest may sometimes represent the cumulative result of many smaller and often conflicting actions -- as well as failures to act -- at lower levels of the bureaucracy.

Besides emphasizing the effect of bureaucratic phenomena upon Soviet policymaking, this model also views the top leadership itself as a far from homogeneous group prepared to speak with a single voice on the issues which come before it. Rather, the ruling oligarchy is presumed to have many differing alignments of interest and ties with various competing pressure groups; it is seen to engage in internal political maneuvering and to strike committee compromises which may tend to water down its decisions and often rob them of logical consistency. Implicit in this model also is the notion that the ruling oligarchy, being made up of shifting internal coalitions, is inherently unstable.

With respect to the matter of leadership instability, incidentally, I think a word of caution is warranted against equating the notion of constant conflict within Communist ruling elites with instability of the leadership structure itself. It is a rather sobering thought, if one ponders it, that the Soviet leadership has enjoyed a rather remarkable continuity. For example, the USSR since 1917 has had only eight Prime Ministers compared with 11 for Britain, and seven heads of state compared with 10 Presidents of the United States. In Foreign Ministers, the USSR has had only seven compared with 19 for Britain and 14 for the U.S., while the top Soviet post -- that of the First or General Secretary of the Party -- has been occupied by only three men since its establishment 47 years ago. To be sure, if one were to compile a list of all the Soviet officials purged in the past 50 years, it would be spectacular too. But perhaps the point this kind of elite turnover via purge really underscores is the staying power of the Communist leadership structure itself.

So much then for this brief comment on the policymaking environment in which the leadership of the USSR appears to operate. My purpose in discussing analytical approaches was to convey that one should be wary of attempts to fit actual Soviet behavior into any given abstract model, or to explain Soviet priorities and policy decisions in terms of any single set of determinants -- economic, strategic, ideological, historical, bureaucratic or whatever. Against this background, let me turn specifically now to some of the main trends in Soviet foreign and defense policy under the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime.

FOREIGN POLICY TRENDS

For the first year or so after the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime replaced Khrushchev in October 1964, the new Soviet collective leadership tended to mark time in the realm of foreign policy while its energies were focused mainly on such tasks as consolidating its power at home and seeking ways to improve the performance of the ailing Soviet economy. By early 1966, however, as various problems and challenges in the field of foreign affairs sought out the new leadership, it became apparent that the outlines of a Soviet foreign policy bearing the distinctive impress of the successor regime in both style and substance had begun to take shape.

With regard to style, the post-Khrushchev leadership began by stressing delovitost' -- or business-like behavior -- apparently intending to conduct Soviet foreign policy in a more sober and restrained fashion than had been the case under Khrushchev, who was given to a rather ebullient and at times seemingly adventuresome personal diplomacy. For

a while, the new regime's style served to create the impression of colorless committee leadership moving toward moderation and traditional norms of international behavior. Gradually, however, as a deepening reversion to orthodoxy set in among the collective oligarchs, and especially after the Czechoslovak affair, this image of an essentially prudent and pragmatic leadership gave way to one of a ruthless leadership capable of unpredictable and even desperate actions.

With regard to substance, four major areas of foreign policy have tended to dominate the attention of the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime, and in a sense, to compete for priority on its policy agenda. These have concerned Soviet relations with China, with the United States, with the countries of the Middle East, and with Europe -- both its Western and Eastern halves. Let us then review briefly the major decisions and developments which appear to have characterized Soviet policy in the past five years in each of these instances.

CHINA

In the case of China -- Moscow's principal rival within the Communist world -- relations had been left in rather bad shape by Khrushchev, whose timetable for a showdown conference in December 1964 to read Peking out of the world Communist movement threatened to precipitate a fresh crisis in the Sino-Soviet quarrel. The new Soviet regime initially tried to mollify Peking by deferring the conference and making other conciliatory gestures, but soon found that Mao's price for harmony was higher than it cared to pay.

The Soviet Union then adopted what might be termed a policy of seeking to isolate China within the world Communist movement. Soviet tactics were marked by minimum use of retaliatory invective and by appeals for "unity" within the Communist camp in support of North Vietnam. By the autumn of 1966, aided by the early excesses of Mao's "Cultural Revolution," the Soviet leaders had contained Peking's influence to the point that they felt it profitable to revive the idea of a world Communist conference. Unlike Khrushchev, however, they did not threaten to excommunicate China, but apparently counted on letting Peking's refusal to have any part of an ecumenical Communist gathering speak for itself.

A second phase in the development of Soviet policy toward China seems to have begun some time around the end of 1966 when the Kremlin leaders evidently gave up hope of reconciliation with Mao's regime and turned to encouragement of any dissident Party factions in Peking that might seek his overthrow. At about this time also, the Soviet Union began quietly to strengthen its military garrisons in the Far East, where occasional rumored clashes along the Sino-Soviet border foreshadowed what were to become several years later highly-publicized border conflict incidents between the two powers. The problem of dealing with China clearly has become an increasingly serious matter for the Soviet Union, leading to widespread speculation this summer that the two Communist powers were on the verge of a major military collision -- which would, of course, shatter one of the fundamental dogmas of Marxist-Leninist theory, namely that war is a product of the

capitalist order, unthinkable between fraternal Communist states. In order to head off such a collision, Moscow and Peking have recently agreed to another effort to negotiate their differences -- the results of which still remain to be seen.

Perhaps the central question for the future from the viewpoint of Soviet policy -- apart from the outcome of these current Sino-Soviet efforts to avert a war -- is whether the Kremlin leadership will find it necessary to shift its top foreign policy priority to Asia on a lasting basis. No final judgment, of course, is possible today, but in my own opinion, at least, despite the gravity of the "China problem," it still has not displaced either the question of Soviet relations with the United States or with Europe as the center of Soviet foreign policy preoccupation.

THE UNITED STATES

In the case of the United States, one may recall, the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime initially inherited a détente in Soviet American relations, which Khrushchev had seen fit to cultivate rather assiduously following his setback in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. That same crisis, however, had exposed the inadequacy of Soviet armaments compared with those at the disposal of the United States, both in strategic nuclear arms and in mobile conventional forces. A salient question posed for the new regime, therefore, was whether the situation did not demand a strenuous effort in the military field to catch up with the USSR's main Western adversary, even if

in the process the maintenance of détente should suffer, with consequent adverse effects on the prospects for domestic economic reform and improvement.

The answer arrived at by the collective Kremlin leadership -- perhaps not without a good deal of painful internal debate over the relative priorities of economic investment and military preparations -- apparently was "yes"; the Soviet Union must put military buildup ahead of the possible advantages of détente. The resultant military programs pursued by the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime over the next few years brought a substantial buildup in offensive and defensive strategic forces, and further development of blue-water naval forces and other elements of Soviet conventional power. The details of this military effort need not be examined here, but among other things, it has contributed to a significant shift in the Soviet-American strategic balance and to the gradual transformation of the USSR from an essentially continental military power into a more truly global one.

How this changing pattern of power may affect the stability of deterrence and the international conduct of the Soviet Union is, of course, a question of no small import. In the past, deterrence was marked by a military and political asymmetry: America's superior nuclear power coincided with a political posture oriented mainly toward containment of the Soviet Union and defense of the existing international order, while the Soviet Union, inferior in strategic power, was wedded to political-ideological aspirations to reshape the world order along Communist lines. Under these circumstances, the weight of American strategic power and superiority in globally-mobile forces

placed definite limits upon the risks the Soviet Union was willing to run. In the newly-emerging power setting of the present period, however, a prime question is whether the Soviet leaders -- no longer laboring under a markedly unfavorable power balance -- may be tempted to pursue somewhat bolder policies than before in seeking to turn the USSR's improved military position to political account.

In a sense, the strategic arms limitation, or SALT, talks -- which have been recurrently postponed over the past two-and-a-half years -- can be expected, when they eventually take place, to represent a forum in which the future Soviet-U.S. power relationship may be worked out. Although it is too early to tell precisely what agreement, if any, may emerge from the negotiations, the central question appears to be the following: After five years of strenuous effort to catch up with the United States in the major elements of strategic power, are the collective leaders in the Kremlin now satisfied to settle for putative parity, and to seal such a relationship with mutual agreement on force levels? Or are they bent upon pursuing further the programs by which the Soviet Union has gradually whittled down the strategic margin of its main Western adversary, and are they therefore likely to prove less interested in curbing the strategic arms competition than in trying to manipulate it to Soviet advantage?

But at this point, let me drop further speculation on this question and turn to some other aspects of Soviet policy toward the United States under the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime. One of the most notable features of the regime's attitude toward the United States has been its highly

ambivalent quality, reflecting perhaps the tangle of conflicting and interdependent interests characteristic of the relationship between these two global rivals.

On the one hand, for example, the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime adopted an increasingly anti-American line quite soon after taking office; it often turned a cold shoulder to periodic U.S. overtures for better relations; it customarily pictured Vietnam as a total barrier to cooperation; and it was prone to playing upon divisions in the West that were due, in part, to the Vietnam conflict. On the other hand, the Soviet leadership apparently felt that a complete freeze in Soviet-U.S. relations would neither force the abandonment of American policy in Vietnam nor serve other Soviet interests -- least of all that of maintaining the tacit "survival pact" between the world's two nuclear superpowers.

Accordingly, the Kremlin kept open lines of negotiation with Washington on a number of specific issues, particularly in the arms control field, where despite the tensions of Vietnam and later of Czechoslovakia, the two powers managed to reach agreement on the nuclear nonproliferation treaty and tentative agreement on the holding of strategic arms limitation talks. The Kremlin leadership also continued to recognize a mutual Soviet-American interest in keeping crisis situations in various parts of the world from developing into armed confrontation between the nuclear superpowers themselves, as attested, for example, by the resort to the "hot-line" and other cooperative steps to contain the Arab-Israeli six-day war in June 1967.

However, the limits of this mutual interest in crisis control were also illustrated in the aftermath of the June

war, when -- once the immediate danger of a Soviet-U.S. military entanglement subsided -- the Soviet leadership showed little enthusiasm for responding to American appeals for restoration of stability in the Middle East and the curbing of another local arms race in the area. Rather, the Kremlin leadership seemingly found it difficult to pass up the opportunity to strengthen the USSR's political-strategic foothold in the Middle East, the more so perhaps because it came at a time when British withdrawal from the region and American preoccupation with Vietnam combined to reduce the chances that Soviet penetration would encounter concerted Western opposition. Only later, when an upward spiral of violent Arab-Israeli incidents in 1968-69 threatened again to produce an acute war crisis, did the Soviet leaders begin to show some renewed interest in a mutual diplomatic effort by interested outside powers to resolve the Arab-Israeli impasse. Significantly, however, there has been no suggestion from Moscow that the Soviet Union intends to reduce its Mediterranean fleet or the other military and political commitments it has taken on in the Middle East since the June war in its attempt to establish a positive sphere of Soviet influence there.

Amongst the impediments to the easing of Soviet-American relations, perhaps none in the past few years stands out more conspicuously than the invasion of Czechoslovakia. I shall take up this sorry adventure of the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership a bit later on. Suffice it to note here that with regard to Soviet-American relations, the invasion not only brought to a momentary halt the tentative exploration of such steps toward accommodation as the

strategic arms talks; in a broader sense, it also seemed to suggest that East-West "bridge-building" looked more dangerous to the orthodox oligarchs in the Kremlin than would a return to the frowning hostility of a Cold War environment. Nevertheless, if past experience is a reliable guide -- and that includes both the cases of Hungary and Vietnam -- one can expect that, even though the Czechoslovak intervention threw up a formidable obstacle to genuine improvement of Soviet-U.S. relations, the two nuclear superpowers will sooner or later resume their groping search for some basis of accommodation.

EUROPE

Turning now to the place of Europe in Soviet policy, it may be recalled that at the time the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime came to power in 1964 there was a rather widespread belief in Western Europe that the old bipolar division of Europe was breaking down under the influence of détente and that after two decades of Cold War the partitioned continent might at last be moving toward some sort of reconciliation. The hopeful "bridge-building" mood of this period helped, among other things, to stimulate questioning in Western Europe of the continued need for NATO defense against a Soviet military threat presumed to be dying, if not already dead.

For its part, the new Soviet regime was careful not to apply threatening pressures against Europe. Rather, during its first couple of years or so in office, it sought to establish closer political and economic ties with Western European countries and to foster the idea that

new Pan-European collective security arrangements would help to settle the long-standing "German problem" as well as to provide a timely alternative to NATO when its members became eligible to quit the alliance one year after NATO's twentieth anniversary in 1969.

In the general climate of the mid-sixties, the European diplomacy pursued by the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime seemed to offer reasonable prospects for progress toward some of the principal objectives of Soviet policy in Europe. Although it could be doubted whether the USSR counted any longer upon bringing about revolutionary social and political transformations in Western Europe, Soviet policy appeared still to be aimed at such familiar objectives as the break-up of NATO, the weakening of West European ties with the United States, and the isolation and demoralization of West Germany -- objectives which, if attained, would leave the Soviet Union in a position of dominance on the European continent and enhance its global power position relative to the United States. In a sense, Soviet aims could be described as seeking to upset the postwar status quo in the Western half of a divided Europe while preserving it in the East.

The essential flaw in this policy design, however, lay in the Kremlin leadership's inability to arrest, without recourse to naked force, the gradual erosion of Soviet authority and control in East Europe, where the process of change and internal reform at work since the "de-Stalinization" campaign of Khrushchev's day came dramatically to the surface once more in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Even before the Czechoslovak crisis came to a head in July and August 1968, the Soviet leaders had

become so preoccupied with defending their position in East Europe against the undermining effects of freer East-West intercourse in general and Bonn's Ostpolitik in particular that they had virtually surrendered the initiative in European affairs which such circumstances as American distraction with the war in Vietnam had helped to place in their hands. Thus, despite a situation in Western Europe "objectively" ripe for important Soviet gains, it could be said that the Soviet leadership's regression to dogmatic defense of orthodoxy had begun to foreclose the opportunities open to a flexible Soviet diplomacy in the Western half of Europe even before the Soviet blow fell upon Czechoslovakia.

The invasion itself yielded mixed results in terms of Soviet interests. On the favorable side of the ledger, some of its effects were: (1) to reestablish the credibility of Soviet military power as the prime instrument of Soviet control in East Europe, a credibility that had been steadily eroding since Khrushchev last demonstrated a willingness to employ raw force in Hungary 12 years earlier; (2) to snuff out the Czechoslovak reform experiment and to lay to rest Soviet fears that it might spread to other parts of Russia's East European domain; (3) to leave a larger Soviet military presence than before deployed in the key "northern tier" area of the Warsaw Pact on NATO's doorstep; and (4) to serve notice on West Germany that Moscow held the keys to any bargains Bonn might hope to strike in the East, thus reminding Bonn that it must be prepared to offer serious concessions if it hoped to keep its Ostpolitik alive.

On the other hand, the Czechoslovak invasion also entailed some obvious debits for the Soviet Union. Among other things, it shattered the image of a mellowing, peace-loving Soviet Union and created an impression of Soviet unpredictability, which, together with the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine of intervention used to justify the invasion, helped to spur NATO to halt the gradual rundown of its military posture that had been taking place for several years and gave NATO a fresh sense of its relevance to European security. Further, the invasion widened fissures within the Communist movement in Western Europe and squandered much of the neutralist sentiment and other political capital the Soviet Union had accumulated there; it also prompted the United States to begin mending its relations with its European allies and to put off at least temporarily the opening of strategic arms talks with Moscow. Even in Czechoslovakia itself -- where the pressure of the Soviet occupation finally succeeded earlier this year in replacing the Dubcek regime with a more conservative, pro-Soviet leadership -- the population has continued to harbor sullen resentment against the Soviet Union, and the questionable reliability of the country's armed forces has meant that the USSR must shoulder a larger share of collective Warsaw Pact defense.

Today the Czechoslovak invasion lies more than a year in the past, and the Kremlin evidently is trying to steer Soviet-West European relations back onto the track they were on prior to the Czechoslovak "interruption." Moscow's overtures to Western Europe for a return to pre-invasion "normality" are still hampered, however, by what seems an almost obsessive fear of spontaneous change anywhere

in the Soviet orbit, which puts the Soviet leadership in the incongruous position of trying to restore cooperative relations with West European countries while at the same time seeking to stave off what it calls "subversion" and "ideological penetration" of its system from the West.

Meanwhile, the eruption of new difficulties with China in the Far East also is having an effect on Moscow's policies toward both halves of a divided Europe. With respect to the NATO countries (including the United States), the troubled situation in the Far East provides a further incentive for a Soviet diplomacy aimed at keeping tensions within bounds on the European front. With regard to the Warsaw Bloc countries of Eastern Europe, the Soviet leadership already has called upon them -- as did Brezhnev in March of this year -- to send "symbolic military detachments" to the Sino-Soviet border area to demonstrate support of the Soviet Union. Should Moscow persist in efforts to enlist East European military backing against Peking -- even on a symbolic basis -- this would amount to a significant change in the original conception of the Warsaw Pact, widening its scope from an alliance facing westward against NATO Europe to one also facing eastward against a major Communist power.

In concluding this survey of Soviet foreign policy trends under the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime, let me offer two or three final observations.

First, over the course of time, the foreign commitments of this regime have tended to expand -- partly perhaps from deliberate decisions to increase the scale of political-military competition with the United States for global influence, and partly perhaps because several

major unforeseen crises -- the Middle East war, Czechoslovakia, border conflicts with China -- were thrust upon the Soviet Union, calling for larger commitment of Soviet resources and prestige than the leadership may have bargained for.

Second, as new patterns of world relations have emerged in the past five years -- gradually transforming the bipolarity of an earlier period into a more multi-sided international system in which at least several centers of power interact with each other -- traditional alignments of interest have begun to shift, imposing upon the Soviet leadership a far more complex task than before in deciding where Soviet foreign policy priorities should be placed.

Finally, perhaps the salient question posed by all this is whether the collective oligarchs in the Kremlin will prove capable of finding fresh and constructive solutions to the problems facing the Soviet Union in an age of pervasive change, or whether they will simply seek to maintain themselves in power by clinging to the orthodox habits and methods of the past.